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DEFENSE SECRETARY COHEN ENDORSES PANEL'S KEY CONCLUSION THAT FUNDAMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE REFORM IS ESSENTIAL TO TRANSFORMATION OF US MILITARY

Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen today endorsed the National Defense Panel's (NDP) call for accelerating the transformation of US military capabilities using savings generated by aggressive business reforms and additional base closures. The Secretary praised the report for its focus on the fundamental challenge facing the Department of Defense: to meet the demands of shaping the international environment and responding to the full spectrum of crises in the near term while at the same time transforming our forces to address the challenges of an uncertain future. Cohen said, "I especially support the NDP's view that fundamental reform of the Defense Department's support infrastructure, including two additional BRAC rounds, is key to an effective transformation strategy." He noted that the thrust of the NDP's recommendations are consistent with those reached in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and the recent Defense Reform Initiative (DRI).

Secretary Cohen also announced that, working closely with the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he will take a direct role in leading the Department of Defense effort to build a coherent, long-term strategy for transforming US military forces to meet future challenges. His goals for this effort, like those of the NDP, are to integrate all DoD transformation activities and to accelerate the transformation process. This process must harness advanced technology through the development of new operational concepts to produce fundamentally different forces for the future.

Cohen noted that the extent and pace of the Department's transformation efforts depend critically on the availability of resources to invest in necessary research, development, testing, experimentation and procurement. He was therefore particularly pleased with the Panel's support for the infrastructure initiatives put forward in the recently published Defense Reform Initiative. He hastened to add that efficient business practices and reduced overhead not only free up needed resources, but also contribute directly to the transformation of the Department's support structure. "The old philosophy was the bigger eat the smaller," he stated. "Now, it is the fast eat the slow. We're going to be fast. We're going to be lean. We're going to be very competitive." To achieve a transformation of the Department's business practices that keeps pace with the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), Cohen called attention to the DRI's plans to re-engineer business practices, consolidate organizations to remove redundancy, encourage competition to reduce costs and improve quality, and eliminate excess support structures.

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Secretary Cohen applauded the long-term focus of the NDP report, which examined the period from now until 2020, and its insightful characterization of the future. "The NDP paints a compelling and, I believe, accurate picture of a future in which terrorism, information operations, and weapons of mass destruction play a more prominent role, even posing direct threats to the U.S. homeland." He stated that we should expect challenges to our ability to project power abroad and our assured access to space. He credited the Panel for calling greater attention to our military preparations for urban operations and is particularly interested in exploring the Panel's recommendations on homeland defense, new roles for Guard and Reserve forces, and changes in the Unified Command Plan.

Secretary Cohen noted that, to contend with many of these challenges, DoD already has underway an ambitious program of transformation efforts to exploit the Revolution in Military Affairs. The Services, Joint Staff, unified commands, and Office of the Secretary of Defense are all aggressively involved in experimenting with new approaches to conducting military operations. Research and development, wargames, field exercises, and simulations are contributing to the development of these new approaches.

"Using Joint Vision 2010 as our conceptual template, we must ensure our methods for conducting joint military operations are just as 'cutting edge' as the technology we deploy, so that we make the most of that technology. The NDP's ideas will be an important contribution in advancing the already significant work being conducted by the Defense Department," Cohen said.

Cohen plans to build upon the Panel's recommendations to give greater focus and energy to the many Department-wide transformation activities. Toward this end, he has asked the Deputy Secretary of Defense to chair an RMA oversight council comprised of the senior leadership of the Department that would meet regularly to review the Department's current and planned transformation activities and recommend areas that could benefit from greater "jointness."

In making these announcements, Cohen noted that the NDP's emphasis on a transformation strategy was consistent with that of the QDR strategy of shape, respond, and prepare. He pointed to the considerable emphasis given in the QDR to preparing for an uncertain future, which, he noted, represents a significant innovation on earlier defense planning.

Echoing the Panel's report, Cohen stressed that "the Department of Defense does not have the luxury to choose between shaping and responding in the near term and transforming itself for the future. We must do both." He said that he will be aggressive in exploring the Panel's recommendations for longer-term change.

The National Defense Panel report is being issued today. As outlined in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, the Secretary of Defense will provide comments to Congress on the National Defense Panel report by December 15, 1997.

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